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AUTHOR Verzaro, Marce; Potter-Kemmer, Amy
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ABSTRACT

The Reagan Administration decided not to convene a national White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1981; instead, some portion of the conference monies were offered to states and territories so that relevant related activities could be conducted at state and local levels. Some 47 states and territories accepted the offer of funds, utilizing the monies in various ways. This paper compares how 27 states and one territory made use of the federal funds they received. Concluding remarks point out benefits of having a conference at the national level. Also included in the paper is a table, organized by state, displaying categories of conference data. For each participating state, number of participants, focus and goals of the conference, processes used, results, follow-up, evaluation results, and state agency in charge are indicated. (RH)

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THE 1981 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
STATE CONFERENCES
IMPLICATIONS OF "NEW FEDERALISM"

Dr. Marce Verzaro
Statewide Supervisor
NYS Migrant Child Care Program
50 Walden Creek Drive
Batavia, NY 14020

(716) 344-2705

Amy Potter-Kemmer
Executive Director
Crittenton Services of Nashville
Suite 208, 250 Venture Circle
Nashville, TN 37228

(615) 255-2722

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The White House Conference for Children and Youth is a tradition started in 1909 by President Theodore Roosevelt. Encouraged by groups of civic-minded and philanthropic citizens, President Roosevelt charged the first conferees to marshal support for governmental planning and protection of the nation's children.

Approximately every ten years since the first Conference, the President in office has convened a White House Conference on Children. The 1950 Conference focused on societal threats to healthy growth and development. The 1970 Conference focused on new family roles (e.g., working mothers) and supportive services (e.g., child care). As Beck noted (Harvard Educational Review, 1973, 43, 653-668), each Conference has reflected on issues from the past decade and planned priorities for the next decade.

Plans for the 1981 Conference on Children and Youth were begun by President Carter. Marie Oser, a child and family advocate active in Texas child care and family issues, was appointed as the executive director. Plans for a December 1981 Conference were well underway, when the 1980 presidential election resulted in the defeat of Jimmy Carter and the election of Ronald Reagan.

It is important to remember that in 1980, the three White House Conferences on Families had been held. All three meetings had some controversy attached to them, as a so-called Pro-Family coalition emerged to challenge both the definition of critical family issues, as well as the proposed solutions to these same issues. One of the key foci of the Pro-Family groups was the need for various levels of government, most particularly the Federal level, to decrease its involvement in issues directly impinging on family functioning.

Such a position was congurent with that of the new Reagan Administration, whose platform was replete with references to less government. Given this context, it is not surprising that the Reagan Administration decided to abandon the notion of a national Conference. The Reagan Administration decided to offer to each state, some portion of the Conference monies to hold relevant activities at the state and local levels. The emphasis was to be on bringing activities closer to the citizenry. Some forty-seven states and territories chose to accept the offer of funds, and they proceeded to utilize the monies in various ways. The following is a comparison of how 27 states and one territory utilized the funds to focus on children and youth.

An analysis of the accompanying table permits the following observations:

1. States used their flexibility to focus on different issues. The majority of the states in this study did choose to look at the range of issues affecting children and youth. This was done by defining the issues, bringing in experts to respond to the issues, and asking conferees to come up with sets of recommendations or proposals of changing governmental and/or private sector structures which influence the lives of children and youth.

A few states, however, decided to focus more narrowly on a single topic. When this choice was made, the topic had to do with that age bracket noted as "youth", specifically adolescents. No state in this report chose to focus

solely on "children", or those persons from birth to age 12. Given the emphasis on young children, which has permeated the human services in the last 20 years, it is interesting that the youth emphasis did occur. One possible explanation could be that these conferences were under the auspices of state departments of human or social services, whose personnel might be more conversant with youth-oriented issues.

2. As noted above, the format most often chosen was that of a statewide conference, featuring keynoters, workshops, and (not as often) group sharing of recommendations. Attempts were made in several states (e.g., Illinois, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, Puerto Rico, Utah, Hawaii) to preceed the conference by either a regional conference, public hearings or public opinion polls. In this way, more citizen input on issue definition and solution was possible. Further, conferees could come to the state meeting with data available for discussion. Formulation of the issues did not depend on state employees and the biases they might bring to issue definition.

3. An emphasis throughout the Conferences was on the future - the notion of what lies ahead in the '80's, and how to respond to the changing climate. Given that these conferences occured in 1981, it is natural to see how such an emphasis was possible. But beyond the date, there seemed to be a recognition that the human services were entering a new era, where cooperation between private and public sectors was vital. Several Conferences focused on this issue specifically (e.g., Vermont, California, Washington State).

4. There was a striking similarity in the issues raised and defined through the Conferences. For anyone concerned with children and families, the issues will not be a surprise. Items such as the humanizing the workplace to make it supportive of family growth, making the "system" more responsive to child care needs, and re-orienting the public schools to provide better basic skills orientation were discussed in many states. It is important to note that these and other issues are the very ones which emerged at the three White House Conferences on Families, and the General Mills Survey of Families, done in conjunction with that effort. Clearly, both professionals and family members remain focused on a rather well-defined set of concerns.

5. Similarly, the recommendations for addressing these issues were similar. Change in employer practices, financial support of child care services, emphasis on competency testing, are typical recommendations which emerged in the Conferences, as well as in other surveys and meetings where these issues are discussed.

6. Since the issues and solutions do not appear to be new, it is important to ask why they continue to emerge. One answer that might be found is the lack of follow-up activities noted in the Conference Reports. It appears that few states set aside money or time to provide for implementation of the recommendations. The exceptions to this are interesting. In Utah, the Conference was planned to be process not issue-oriented with the goal that teams of youth and professionals would return to their local area with some skills necessary to address local problems. Inherent in this goal, is some consideration of the importance of post-conference, local endeavors. In Montana, eighteen local areas submitted follow-up proposals to implement activities in communities. However, these state efforts were the exception, not the rule. Therefore, it would seem that the Federal

Government's goal of bringing the concern down to the most relevant level for the citizenry was not accomplished, as the follow-up and implementation phase appears missing in most Conference reports.

7. Most Conference reports do not mention whether or not evaluation of the Conferences was done by the participants. Those that did systematically tap opinion, found that the large number of respondents were positive in their feedback. Workshops seemed more favorable than did speakers, perhaps reflecting the experience of being able to be more a part of discussion group is more satisfying than being a passive listener to a speech.

CONCLUSIONS:

Despite what appears to have been positive experiences in most states the question must be addressed "Did it make a difference that the White House Conference on Children and Youth did not happen at the national level"? Obviously impossible to answer at one level, it is possible to speculate that its lack and replacement lead to the following:

1. Whatever its complexity, having a national conference makes it more feasible that the national media will focus, however briefly, on children and youth. Further, it is possible that the Congressional Offices may be forced to at least hear concerns in this area. Further, past Conferences have resulted in a national agenda or platform for children and youth. A great deal of progress for children and yough has been made, in part by referring to the outcomes of these Conferences. It is easy not to make children a federal priority when they are not discussed at the federal level.

2. Having state and local efforts, however, may mean that more citizens are enlightened about child and youth issues, which directly impact upon their lives. Further, it is easier to stimulate involvement of more people, and to sustain whatever committment does develop. Liaisons and networks can be established and more easily maintained, because they involve persons struggling with the same state regulations, bureaucracies, and issues. However, when the issue or problem cannot be resolved at the state or local level a gap has been created.

STATE	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	FOCUS OF CONFERENCE	GOAL(s) OF CONFERENCE	PROCESSES USED	RESULTS	FOLLOW-UP	EVALUATION RESULTS	STATE AGENCY IN CHARGE
ARKANSAS	No Conference held because of short time frame required for spending (as per letter from Governor Frank White to President Reagan on 11/9/81)							
CALIFORNIA	250 delegates from 24 of the 58 counties in the state.	Youth Employment	To bring together persons involved in youth employment, so linkages and sharing could develop.	A Conference with speakers, workshops, a resource room, and a job fair.	3 Recommendations: 1. Expand youth employment program. 2. Increase public and private job preparation in work ethics and readiness. 3. Develop structures to coordinate employment efforts.	A blueprint for youth hiring in the summer of 1982 was developed. An employer checklist for youth employment was made available.		Planning Committee w/representatives of 17 public agencies and a steering committee which also included private sector representatives
COLORADO	Unknown	Conferences topics included: social services for special needs children; adolescent health; employment of disabled; youth	Varied by Conference. For example, special needs children Conference had as a goal, the understanding of relevant state and federal legislation by agency workers.	Several Conferences on various topics.	Various task forces and reports.	Varied by Conference	Varied by Conference	Each Conference sponsored by different state agency Governor's Office served as clearing house.
DISTRIC OF COLUMBIA	Not reported.	Creating a new world for children and youth in the '80's .	To examine family structure to see how District can assist familes, and to examine private/volunteer funding	Conference using 1. Resource fair 2. Specifics 3. Issues panels 4. Youth speak-out panesl 5. Presentation of workshop recommendations	A series of recommendations in areas of child care, employment, education, health legal systems, recreational, and social services.	A report with suggestions as to how District agencies can be more effective in serving families needs.	Not reported	District's Department of Human Services

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GEORGIA	1,032	Children and Youth	1. To emphasize partnership of public and private sectors. 2. To know and understand needs/problems of children and youth, and how to be effective in local communities	1. ½ day general session, 1½ days of workshops, closing session with keynote Address. 2. Use of skill development [illegible]s (3 types) and subject matter workshops (40)	There were to be no recommendations voted upon or position papers presented, or no resolutions passed.	None reported.	Speakers, skill area workshops were well received (20% return rate)	Division of Human Development
ILLINOIS	800(+) delegates, 300 observers	Children's Priorities for the '80's'.	To prioritize a wet of 426 recommendations on children's services, derived from regional conferences.	1. Hearings were conducted and questionnaires given out to identify key issues in trends of children's services. 2. Local committees prepared draft recommendations 3. A statewide Conference was held to vote on recommendations (426) 4. A follow-up Conference was held to prioritize recommendations.	Specific recommendations in 16 areas.	None mentioned	None mentioned	Commission on Children
INDIANA	388 plus 23 resource people and 7 speakers	Education, employability, health, and social well-being of children and youth.		1. Development of plans of action for each topic areas with a goal, at least one objective and a plan of implementation. 2. Two-day conference	A report listing goals and objectives for each of the focus areas.	Each plan of action calls for local or statewide advisory body to implement recommendations.	76% felt conference was good Only 7% disagreed.	Office of the Governor.

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IOWA	800 were invited	Crime Prevention and juvenile delinquency	to develop delinquincy prevention methods	Mini-conferences on various related areas, in conjunction with the Governor's Annual Youth Conference	Stimulation of interest in legislation and community based efforts	Local mini-conferences; redeployment of state human service personnel and funding of local projects	None noted	Governor's Office for Volunteers
KANSAS	900	Program for children	To increase linkages between children's programs.	Two seperate Conferences which showcased current programs. Had a panel presentation and workshop.	A series of summary statements from each workshop.	Compilation of a resource directory and bibliography	Comments from participants showed appreciation for efforts made.	Children and Youth Advisory Committee and State Department of Social and Renabilitation Services.
KENTUCKY	500(+)	Future of Children	To develop strategies for strengthening children's securities.	Conference with speakers and forums.	A series of issues, definitions, and recommendations	The report was sent to all participants, state agencies, and legislators	None noted	Department for Human Resources.
MAINE	300 adults, 100 children	Children and Families	How to build communities that are responsive to children	Seven forums, each with a presentation by an expert and a panel. Also keynote addresses	A report on each forum.	Resource list and fact sheet	List of comments from participants, show people learned a variety of new approaches.	Department of Human Resources.
MASSACHUSETTS	800(+)	Families	To find some strategies for serving and strengthening families in era of rapid change.	Keynote sessions and 11 forums.	A series of proposals from each forum, which were n not voted upon by general session.	None noted.		Governor's Advisory Committee on Children and the Family.
TENNESSEE	500 in Conferenc 3,000+ in total one yr. project	Volunteers in children and youth services	To create a greater awareness of children & youth serv. & to promote greater volunteer support & involvement.	County Meetings Public Hearings 2 day training Conference Media Campaign Resource Fair	Trained 500 people, created greater awareness through media, created a strong network	5 month follow up/capacity building phase which enabled training of 500 add. people	Conferees evaluated conference as positive experience	Tennessee Children's Services Commission

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MICHIGAN	600	Families and Children	To disucss issues in light of more or less government services	1. Series of public hearings to define issues 2. Public opinion poll to determine where Michigan public stood on family issues. 3. Two-day Conference.	A series of recommendations from all conference sessions, to be pulled together by a task force	Distribution of public opinion, poll results, and task force priorities.	None noted	Department of Social Services
MINNESOTA		Stress and Families	To examine sources of family stress, to see how families cope and to develop a set of guidelines for program development	Conference where 100 models & programs were presented, with emphasis on linkages of public & private sector.	A series of 52 recommendations on helping families to cope with stress.	None noted.	None noted	Family Social Science Department, University of Minnesota
MISSOURI	400	Children and Youth	Establishing networks between public and private sectors	General session speakers and focused workshops	Series of recommendations from the workshops. A fact book was published.	Sponsoring committee will help to implement Conference recommendations	None noted	Governor's Committee on Children and Youth
MONTANA	1,500 in just two phases	Children and Youth	Need for preventative program	1. Statewide survey to find out issues. 2. Statewide conference 3. Localized follow-up activities.	Series of recommendations from the conference.	18 local follow-up proposals received		Statewide Steering Committee appointed by the delegates.
NEW HAMPSHIRE	400(+)	Children and Youth Services	To create public awareness of issues; to develop recommendations	Conference with 3 keynote speakers, 9 workshops, films, a youth presentation, & an information sharing session	Series of legislative and programmatic recommendations	Continued work by Conference Planning Committee; New England Conference early in 1982.		Comprehensive Children and Youth Project

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NEW JERSEY	400	Children	To review findings of the Commission's survey	1. The Commission had assessed the efficiency of the existing delivery system.	Series of recommendations from 11 workshops.	Final report to be prepared by the Commission, and involvement of community members to implement changes	Overwhelmingly positive	New Jersey Commi-sions on Children's Services
NEW MEXICO	1,200 persons at the regional; 400 at state conference.	Youth in the "80's"	Identify youth issues and propose solution	Six regional and one statewide conference. Direct involvement of youth in planning & implementation.	Series of recommendations on youth issues.	Report by a youth group to the legislature. Videotape available to public T.V.	None noted.	Statewide Steering Committee
NORTH CAROLINA	410	Children and Youth	To focus on private programs already meeting needs of children	1. Statewide Conference with keynote speaker, slide/tape and two specialized conferences: a. business round-table b. public/private sector 2. Slide/tape presentation on children in N.C. 3. Statewide report on problems & existing solution. 4. Local Conferences.	1. Nineteen Chamber of Commerce Directors indicated interest in local conference. 2. Production of mass media material	Activities to be held - no data as to if they actually were held.	None noted.	Governor's Office of Citizens Affairs
PENNSYLVANIA	Have to ascertain	State of PA.'s Children	To stimulate interest of citizens in children	Teleconference on statewide public TV.; using 20 min. slide/tape & panel responding to audience questions.	Production of a 20 min. film designed to stimulate discussion.	Availability of film in kits including cassette of tele conference, along with discussion guide	None noted.	Office of Children, Youth, and Families-

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PUERTO RICO	250 (50 adults, 200 children & youths)	Issues in lives of children and youth	To identify issues in lives of children & youth as perceived by youths.	10 original conferences, followed by State Conference.	Recommendations voted on by whole group	None noted	None noted.	Department of Social Services
SOUTH CAROLINA	650	Future of Children	To discuss issues impacting on children and youth, with emphasis on future.	Gathering together representatives of all state agencies into 32 workshops and speakers.	Sharing of Apt-times competing agencies in non-adversonal setting.	Need for follow up conference identified.	None noted.	Office of Governor and University of South Carolina
UTAH	182 (105 Youths)	Youth	To develop problem-solving youth-adult teams from local communities.	Public opinion poll, followed by a Process-training Conference for youth, using youth-teacher teams from local school districts	Developing of team who had experienced the process-approach to solving problems.	Local team had identified problem issues & were to return home and work on them.		Division of Children, Youth, & Families
VERMONT	13,000 in all activities	Children and Youth	To increase professional's skills; to promote family strengthening activities, to develop partnership	1. A two day conference on child sexual abuse. 2. Development of a Children's Task Force to work with state 3. Have a week-long, statewide celebration	Variety of activities throughout the state.	Some activities will be continued.	None noted.	Department of Social Rehabilitation Series
WASHINGTON STATE	900	Careers & Employment of Children and Youth	How to bridge gap between what youth learn in school and their employability	Statewide Conference with presentations & workshops, with persons from public education and business sector.	Collective recommendations about improved public school basic-skills training, and career coordination.	None noted	None noted	Office of the Governor

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WYOMING		Children and Youth	Not clear from report.	Statewide Conference, with specifices, workshops, films & "speak-out" sessions.	A report which included comments of participants.	None noted.	None Noted.	Wyoming Council for Children and Youth.
HAWAII	100 delegates, 150 guests	Children and Youth	To define issues and get recommendations about children, from birth to age 24	1. Each county could develop its own activities, with state funds. 2. Statewide committee reviewed findings, prepared a draft of issues. 3. This draft was reworked at a state conference.	List of recommendations.	Report will be sent to legislature and state agencies for implementation	None noted	Office of Children and Youth